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The Nature Conservancy in Massachusetts**

**Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources
Biomass Eligibility Criteria under the Renewable Portfolio Standard
August 12, 2010**

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments regarding the directions provided by the Secretary of the Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) to the Department of Energy Resources (DoER) regarding eligibility criteria for biomass for renewable energy credits under the regulations for renewable portfolio standards. The Conservancy appreciates the science-based due diligence and opportunities for public comment with which EEA and DoER are considering state policy.

The Nature Conservancy is an international, nonprofit conservation organization. Our mission is to preserve the plants, animals, and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. Our work is carried out in all 50 states and 31 countries and is supported by 34,000 members in Massachusetts and over one million members worldwide.

The Conservancy's comments are limited to three topics addressed by the Secretary in his directive to DoER: sustainable harvesting guidelines, residues and carbon neutrality. The Conservancy has also added some comments regarding siting and impacts on freshwater resources.

The Nature Conservancy's vision for Massachusetts is a network of large, intact forest reserves, surrounded by a larger matrix of forests managed for multiple purposes, including wood products. These forests would host free-flowing rivers and all native plants and animals, including trees of all species and ages found across the different soil types and landforms of Massachusetts.

Sustainable Harvesting and Residues

The Conservancy agrees with the Secretary's statement that: "Forest wood used as fuel should be harvested consistent with Chapter 132 of the General laws [the Massachusetts Forest Cutting Practices Act] and associated regulations, and in compliance with a forest management plan..."

The Conservancy would like DoER regulations to require that forest wood used as fuel also meet Forest Guild guidelines ([Biomass Retention and Harvesting Guidelines for the Northeast](#)). These guidelines set specific targets for several criteria that sustain the ecological health and value of forests by maintaining soil fertility and the ability of the forest to provide downed and standing

dead trees for wildlife when harvesting forests for renewable fuels. According to the Guild, its Guidelines:

- Provide definitions of sustainability, biomass, and downed woody material;
- Set specific targets for retention of critical forest structures, including retention of tops and limbs, standing dead trees, and large trees for wildlife;
- Provide guidelines for water quality, riparian zones, harvesting, and operations; and,
- Outline approaches for determining the carbon impact of biomass harvesting.

In addition, the Conservancy believes the regulations should account for the impacts of biomass harvests in the aggregate that may not be captured in looking at individual harvests.

Residue requirements aligned with the recommendations of the Forest Guild would provide adequate nutrient and downed wood retention to support long term forest regeneration and structure.

Carbon-Neutrality

Climate change is a threat to people, animals and habitats around the world. Our collective challenge is to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen our natural areas in order to limit climate change's disruptive effects.

Once carbon life cycle has been fully counted, only biomass energy with a net positive carbon balance should qualify for RPS eligibility. In other words, we should ensure that net carbon emission reduction and/or sequestration occurs. DoER should consider and determine over how many years (ideally a number larger than 1 year and smaller than 100 years) it will measure net carbon balance.

Siting Requirements

The Conservancy also believes that any biomass facilities should meet siting requirements that are developed in cooperation with the Departments of Fish and Game and Environmental Protection. The siting requirements should protect aquatic life from process water discharges, by using technologies such as dry cooling that avoid or minimize impacts to rivers that are caused by traditional evaporative cooling. The requirements should also recognize that both public and private conservation lands have been protected to safeguard a range of public benefits; many of these lands are inappropriate for biomass facility siting and/or harvesting.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please feel free to contact me with any questions at slong@tnc.org or 617-227-7017, extension 313.